

# City of Takoma Park, Maryland

**Communications**  
Telephone: (301) 891-7118  
Fax: (301) 270-8794  
E-mail: cabletv@takomagov.org



7500 Maple Avenue  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

For Immediate Release

## Press Release

### **City of Takoma Park First Maryland Municipality to Support Same Sex Marriages**

**Contact:** Lonni Moffet, Communications 301-891-7236

**TAKOMA PARK, Md., July 14, 2004** - The Takoma Park City Council passed a resolution supporting same sex marriages in Maryland, making it the first municipality in the state to advocate marriage equality for everyone.

“This resolution came about because of grass roots involvement in our community that really demanded for this council to take progressive, vocal action on an issue that’s facing our country and is important to large segments of our community,” said Heather Mizeur, Councilmember (Ward 2), during the Council meeting Monday evening. She continued, “In the shadow of this ugly debate in Congress about whether to write discrimination into our Constitution, our progressive community will be going on record tonight as the first municipality in this state to say that we support marriage equality for all.”

In addition to its unanimous passage during the same week that Congress debates the Federal Marriage Amendment, the resolution comes on the heels of another Maryland event pertaining to same sex-marriages. Just last week, a lawsuit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of nine couples seeking the right to marry in Maryland.

“The most important message of this resolution is that we as a community value equality and diversity. I disagree with many national political figures who have jumped on the bandwagon proclaiming that this country needs a constitutional amendment to protect marriage,” said Bruce Williams, Councilmember (Ward 3). “Marriage as an institution will stand based on the respect that all of us hold for it, and that respect is only strengthened by making sure that we perceive it as fair and equitable. The state interest in marriage is in the stability and economic welfare of its citizens. Marriage in this country conveys many legal rights, and those legal rights are foreclosed to those adults who are prevented from marrying.” Williams continued.

“The City Council intends that this resolution on same-sex marriage support the legal efforts of same-sex couples to obtain the right to marry in Maryland, but we also intend that it assures our gay and lesbian residents that we are behind them on an issue of such importance to our community,” said Mayor Kathy Porter.

(More)

The resolution also favors providing the same federal legal benefits that heterosexual couples receive such as social security survivor benefits, health insurance, filing joint taxes, etc. The City will “give full recognition up to the limits of its legal authority to out-of-state and foreign same-sex marriages, direct its energies to a public campaign of education and equality in Maryland,” and “use its resources to coordinate activities among other local governments, and private enterprises in furtherance of its educational campaign.” The resolution also directs the City to file a friend of the court brief in support of the Plaintiffs in the recently filed lawsuit on marriage equality in Maryland (Deane and Polyak, et. al v. Conaway, Baltimore City Circuit Court Clerk, et. al).

This is not Takoma Park’s first time taking progressive action to provide equal rights to gay and lesbian relationships. In 1993, the City established a Domestic Partnership registry and the city government offers domestic partnership benefits to its City employees.

Councilmember Doug Barry (Ward 6) commented, “Interracial marriage was illegal in Maryland until the mid- 1960s. Let's remove this other vestige of bigotry and discrimination. Same sex marriage is the new civil rights frontier. Making same sex marriage lawful is the right and fair thing to do.”

(Resolution 2004-35 Attached)

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**RESOLUTION NO. 2004-35**

**(Supporting same-sex marriage in Maryland, committing to municipal recognition of out of state same-sex marriages, educating the public, and calling upon all public and private entities to give legal recognition to such marriages)**

WHEREAS, marriage is one of the fundamental elements of individual liberty; and

WHEREAS, the institution of marriage serves as one of the building blocks of society, strengthening and stabilizing relationships between individuals; and

WHEREAS, the institution of marriage provides benefits to society through a system of laws that regulate inheritance, the provision of benefits from government and private programs, the provision of medical care to persons who are not able to make their own medical decisions, and responsibility for financial obligations, among other areas; and

WHEREAS, extending the institution of marriage to same-sex couples gives entities such as the courts, government and private programs, medical institutions, banks, and others the benefits of using the established legal structure that surrounds marriage in serving same-sex couples; and

WHEREAS, the opportunity to commit publicly and legally to share one's life with a person of one's choice is a central aspect of the human experience, and denial of marriage to same-sex couples is a denial of fundamental civil rights; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park understands that marriage develops from a couple's desire for love, security, and family, and that such desires is not confined to the heterosexual population; and

WHEREAS, same-sex marriage, as any other marriage, provides family stability and personal happiness to gay and lesbian couples, their children, and their extended families; and

WHEREAS, contemporary studies find no support for a concern that the children of lesbian and gay parents are harmed by the sexual orientation of their parents; and our experience in Takoma Park confirms the conclusion that the children of gay and lesbian parents are thriving as well as other children in our community; and

WHEREAS, the United States Constitution clearly states that no laws will be made depriving any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law; and

WHEREAS, the United States Constitution states that no person within its jurisdiction will be denied equal protection of the laws; and

WHEREAS, all amendments to the United States Constitution heretofore either clarified or expanded the nation's vision of equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and

WHEREAS, the equal protection provision of the Maryland Constitution Declaration of Rights prohibits gender-based classifications and the basic principle of Maryland's Equal Rights Amendment is that sex is not a permissible factor in determining the legal rights of women, or men, so that the treatment of any person may not be based upon the circumstance that such person or their spouse is of one sex or the other; and

WHEREAS, the freedom of religion provision of the Maryland Constitution Declaration of Rights states that all persons are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty and that denying the validity of a same-sex religious commitment ceremony violates the same-sex couple's freedom of religion rights; and

WHEREAS, the State of Maryland has not adopted a Defense of Marriage Act; and

WHEREAS, discriminatory laws result, especially, in significant harm to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people by perpetuating homophobia, just as anti-miscegenation laws barring people of different races from marrying perpetuated racism and social ostracism; and

WHEREAS, denying civil marriage to lesbian and gay couples would deprive thousands of people

of certain rights, privileges, immunities, protections, and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, discriminatory marriage laws undermine the United States' and State of Maryland's constitutional commitment to equality, privacy and justice for all of its citizens; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park has by local practice, policy, and ordinance shown its commitment to fair and equitable treatment of all and by affording equal rights and benefits to the numerous gay and lesbian couples residing in the City, has consistently been striving to set an example of excellence in the non-discriminatory treatment of all persons and the promotion of the ideal of diversity; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park wants to educate the public, as well as the private and governmental entities on the value and legality of same-sex marriages; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park finds any attempt to codify discrimination into the United States Constitution repugnant and anathema to the tradition of equality that we as a people hold dear; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park opposes the proposal for a Constitutional Amendment to ban same-sex marriage because the United States Constitution is no place for discrimination against citizens; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park finds that a fundamental truth was established that governmental oppression of any kind based on discrimination diminishes us as human beings, so the United States Constitution was designed and written to protect the rights of the minority from the tyranny of the majority; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park calls upon the State of Maryland and its county governments to legalize same-sex marriages and to issue such marriage licenses; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park calls upon public entities and private entities, particularly including insurance companies and other benefit providers, to recognize same-sex marriages as lawful and desirable; and

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park urges the repeal of the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which restricts marriage to a union between a man and a woman.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND** THAT the concept of same-sex marriage is hereby supported both in public law and in private practice; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City will give full recognition up to the limits of its legal authority to out-of-state and foreign same-sex marriages; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City will direct its energies to a public campaign of education about equality in marriage. The City will use its resources to coordinate activities among other local governments and private enterprises in furtherance of its educational campaign; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City will file an amicus curiae brief in support of the Plaintiffs in Deane and Polyak, et. al v. Conaway, Baltimore City Circuit Court Clerk, et. al; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City Clerk shall transmit certified copies of this Resolution to federal, state, county and local officials, as well as the press.

**THIS RESOLUTION IS ADOPTED THIS 12th DAY OF July, 2004.**